L’amour Comme Leurre

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L’amour Comme Leurre

by ExecutiveEspressoDepresso

Summary

Hannibal is patiently waiting for Will to come find him in Florence after leaving him on his kitchen floor. However to his chagrin, he sees Will not in person, but in an article announcing his romance with Doctor Frederick Chilton

Will decides to lure Hannibal to America.

Fruit (dérogatoire)

Chapter Summary

Hannibal is living his best life in Florence until he finds out Will's a bastard

Chapter Notes

I took a crack concept too seriously and this is what happened

Florence, Italy appealed Hannibal Lecter's tastes rather well. The sprawling ancient architecture provided endless inspiration for his artworks, his new position as curator only adding to this fascination. The fine tastes of the people, especially his new coworkers who knew him as Doctor Fell, provided the serial killer with an intellectual atmosphere filled with more scholars than the number of socialites Hannibal previously had to entertain him at his former residence.

It was a delight to prepare food in Italy as well, a variety of new recipes and ingredients opened to him. The fact that Hannibal was required to cut back on killing to avoid suspicion hardly deterred him either, the substitutes available to him were suitable enough not to damper his love of cooking. Authentic wine, herbs, and scallops to feed his wife were just a small fraction of Hannibal's new spread to indulge his exquisite tastes in.

Yes, the good Doctor Lecter was enjoying his new life in Florence. The short months had passed with relative ease and bliss, aside from the minor incident with Antony Dimmond which had been quickly soothed over with promises Hannibal did not intend to keep. He would make a lovely monument for Will.

Once the man decided to hunt him that was. And it was taking longer than Hannibal though it would.

Hannibal tilted his head back in the black leather armchair he was settled in to watch Doctor Du Maurier as she poured herself a glass of blood red wine with the same elegance in which she danced. Given that Bedelia did not seem to be interested in conversation at this moment, as she rarely was, Hannibal allowed his eyes to watch the liquid cascade and splash in the crystal stein, mind drifting once again to Will's absence.

It had been nine months since he'd left Will in his kitchen, clutching the smile Hannibal had carved in his abdomen. The image of the man bleeding out on the tiled floor had emblazoned itself at the forefront of Hannibal's mind, no matter how many days passed. When he had fantasized of the blue eyed man covered in blood before he learned of Will's betrayal, it had not been the man's own soaking through his shirt. The desperation etched on Will's godlike face had haunted Hannibal's waking hours, only aussaged by the comfort that Will would come for him soon, and they would be together again, if Will would forgive him.

The only issue was, Hannibal had been sure Will would be in Florence by now. The ex surgeon had done his best to carve only deep enough that Will would heal with a scar but remain fully functional, and he was certain Will had not died, Freddie Lounds would have reported otherwise. By Hannibal's knowledge, Will should have healed and regained enough strength to begin his hunt for Hannibal at least a month ago. He should have finished his expedition to the Lecter estate weeks ago and should be in Florence currently, looking for Hannibal in all the places the killer knew he would. It was why Antony Dimmond remained alive, there was no point in a tableau if Will wasn't going to see it.

Hannibal refused to let doubt cloud his mind. Will would come, he knew he would. The doctor would just have to be patient. He excelled at waiting, and this time would be no different. Hannibal would not allow it to be.

"Are you thinking about Will Graham?" Bedelia's distance and vaguely medical tone roused Hannibal from his musings, and the older man blinked. Bedelia was drinking from her glass, eyes examining Hannibal over the curve of the crystal as her lips pursed.

Amusement flickered in Hannibal's chest at his wife's reluctance to mention Will Graham. "He has taken longer than I originally anticipated to arrive," Hannibal admitted, shifting his gaze from Bedelia's wine to the fireplace. "He knows where to find me."

Bedelia stepped towards Hannibal with another drink from her glass. She placed a hand on the back of Hannibal's chair, facing the fireplace passively. "You know where he would

look," Bedelia pointed out.

Hannibal turned his head to look up at the other doctor. "'Would'?", Hannibal repeated, brows creasing minutely in confusion. It was an odd choice of words.

"Would," Bedelia said again, raising her wine to her lips. Her elegance was as casual as Hannibal's own, the gentle slope of her back and the way the woman's poised fingers curled around the stem of the glass in her grip.

She was fitting for Hannibal's life in Florence. Even if the clothes he'd brought were monogrammed with Will's initials.

"Had the circumstances been the same as when you departed, he would find you in all the places you know he would look."

Hannibal was thoroughly perplexed now, a feeling he was not used to nor enjoyed. "I'm afraid I do not understand, Doctor Du Maurier," Hannibal said carefully, fingers tracing the arm of the chair.

Bedelia looked down at her husband, and Hannibal saw her brows raised in surprise. The doctor thought he saw a trace of amusement as well.

"Have you not yet read the article, Hannibal?," Bedelia questioned quietly, lowering her glass from her lips as she studied Hannibal's face for indications of expression. "I was under the impression that you closely followed Miss Lounds and her Tattle Crime website."

"Miss Lounds has posted another story?," Hannibal asked, shifting to straighten his posture and glance around for his tablet. Not the same device he had used in Baltimore of course, but there was no shortage of electronic stores in Italy, no matter how ancient the rest of the city was. "That marks twice in a week. She must have quite the source."

Hannibal was delighted at this announcement from his wife. The story posted earlier that week had been a retelling of a serial killer in Connecticut and his murders, entertaining, but not what Hannibal had been hoping for. Perhaps Miss Lounds had recovered some information on Will, he had been optimistic she would use her less than orthodox methods to post such stories about the man. If Bedelia was saying circumstances had changed, his belief was almost undoubtedly correct.

The last story she'd made public about the man was Will's hospitalization and the death of Abigail Hobbs eight months ago. The passing of the girl was regrettable, but Hannibal had no time to grieve over the life Will had deprived them of. Despite their distance, Will's betrayal, and the cost Hannibal's forgiveness came at, the doctor still liked to be informed of what the man was doing and his condition.

There was a pause from Bedelia. "Ah," she said softly, placing her glass on the wooden table next to Hannibal's chair. Her footfalls were soft with the lack of black heels when she walked into the dining room. Hannibal waited patiently, assuming she was retrieving his tablet for him as an act of convenience over kindness. The woman emerged, tapping her manicured nails on the screen with her eyes lowered.

"You are not going to enjoy this news as much as you think you will, Hannibal," she warned delicately, undoubtedly pulling up the article in question.

Hannibal outstretched his hand to take the tablet from Bedelia with a soft smile on his face. Humor bubbled in him again. The woman always behaved in such a skeptical way and it brought a smile to Hannibal's face."Now Doctor Du Maurier, I hoped you would be placated by my optimism-"

The mildly goading words caught in Hannibal's throat as he absorbed the words exhibited on the electronic screen.

SURVIVORS IN LOVE: THE FAUX RIPPERS WHO FOUND EACH OTHER

It was incredibly difficult to see the full article with the way Hannibal's vision went red.

The Article

Chapter Summary

Hannibal reads Freddie Lounds's article on Chilton and Will. He then tries to drown himself in wine while pretending nothing is wrong

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SURVIVORS IN LOVE: THE FAUX RIPPERS WHO FOUND EACH OTHER

Ex-FBI Investigator Will Graham was left gutted, both literally and figuratively, on the kitchen floor of Doctor Hannibal Lecter's kitchen 8 months ago, 12 weeks after being released from prison after being falsely charged with the Chesapeake Ripper murders. Abigail Hobbs was dead beside him, and it took the man five months to fully recover from his injuries.

Doctor Frederick Chilton was stripped of his credentials and shot in the face after being framed for the Chesapeake Ripper murders immediately after Will Graham was relieved of the same charges. He was declared 8 months ago after the same man who gutted Graham was confirmed to be the real Chesapeake Ripper.

What do these two men have in common aside from being arrested for the same crimes neither committed?

They are hopelessly, intensely, in love with each other

Yes dear readers, it is true. Despite the fact that everyone thought Graham and Lecter had formulated a romantic relationship whilst Graham was trying to entrap him, Graham confirms those feelings were entirely faux

“Hannibal Lecter is not a man I could fall in love with,” Graham said quietly when asked the question. Doctor Chilton put his hand on Graham’s shoulder when he said this, and Graham is accounted as leaning into the touch. It is clear the killer has caused Graham a lot of pain. “He has hurt me too much.”

The subject of the interview was quickly changed.

How long have you two been together?

“It’s difficult to say,” Chilton had said. He held hands with Graham and stared at him while he answered the question. “I visited him very soon after he was hospitalized. Then the visits happened weekly, daily. And then when he was released, I kept visiting him in his home.”

“We never really made it official at a certain point,” Graham says. “We both just. Knew.”

“We’d been through much of the same things. It was easy to fall in love with someone who went through so much and...remained so beautiful.”

The two shared a smile.

Graham, did your treatment under Doctor Chilton’s care affect your feelings?

“Not really. It was hard, yes, but I feel like he’s been punished enough for it. There’s no need to punish him more.”

Chilton had grinned and leaned close to Graham. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you, darling?”

This reporter quickly reminded them of where they were.

How is the investigation into Doctor Lecter going?

"I wouldn't know," Graham replied. "I left all that behind. Frederick insisted."

Chilton had nodded while still looking at Graham. "It was causing him too much stress to be worth it. Hannibal Lecter is not worthy of having any effect on my darling Will."

Graham smiled. "It's up to the FBI now. I'm focusing on what really matters. Doctor Lecter doesn't matter to me anymore. I have let him go."

It's not often Tattle Crime reports on non crime stories, what do you enjoy the most about your romance?

"His cooking," Graham responded immediately. He had squeezed Chilton's hand with another smile. "He's so cultured I just...love everything about him. And he always dresses so nice too. It's very inspiring."

"I just love getting to look at him," was Doctor Chilton's answer. He was, in fact, looking at Graham. "He's so gorgeous. All the time. He's like a...Greek god. I can't get enough of him." Chilton had kissed Graham's cheek, making the other man smile.

The interview ended there, as Graham and Chilton had plans for a night at the opera. The couple seem very happy together, both have recovered well from their injuries and make a beautiful pair.

While it is not often within this investigator's realm to report on romance, given the unique conditions of both Graham and Chilton and their intriguing relationship, Tattle Crime thinks readers would enjoy another article on them

It seems as if Doctor Chilton has no issue with Graham's mental instability, and Graham has no problems with Chilton's career in profiting off of people very much like Graham himself

This reporter has no problem with talking to the pair again, and looks forward to having another interview very soon

There was a picture of Will and Frederick Chilton under the title, taken from chest up. Will was standing close to Chilton, wearing *the* salmon button up shirt. His beautiful smile was shining through the screen with a hand on Chilton's shoulder. Chilton had his hand low, it couldn't be said where from what the picture cut off. His typical ostentatious suit was black and red, with a paisley patterned tie in a large double Windsor. He was smiling too, the typical smirk he wore when he thought he won, the same one he'd had at Will's trial.

A second photo at the end of the article was Chilton cupping Will's face as he kissed his cheek.

Hannibal carefully closed his tablet, setting the device on the end table. His fingers adjusted the electronic ever so slightly, taking a deep breath. The doctor carefully curled his hand into a fist and rested his chin against the closed digits, leaning his elbow against the arm of the chair. All of his actions were slow and deliberate, carefully contained and would look relaxed to an outsider.

The doctor exhaled slowly through his nose, closing his eyes which had been burning holes into the wall across from him.

"Doctor Du Maurier," he murmured softly, breathing deeply once more. "If you would be so kind as to pour me a glass."

Bedelia's hand ran over Hannibal's shoulder and he felt her squeeze before letting go and walking to fulfill his request.

Hannibal had experienced anger before. He was only human after all. The man experienced emotions, but he was always in control of how he felt them. Hannibal had never been controlled by his emotions before, he used them as tools, motivations.

When he'd experienced anger before, it had always been cold and calculating. It was a switch that turned on when the doctor took his blood and asked him if he was diseased, and switched off once Hannibal asked for his business card. Crisp, modulated anger is what Hannibal always had.

So this. This white hot rage was something entirely foreign to the man. He felt like he wanted to be covered head to toe in Frederick Chilton's blood. Hannibal wanted to take a knife and cut that insufferable smile off the man's face. It had already been damaged before, would Chilton really miss his lips?

They had no place being anywhere near Will's.

"Thank you Bedelia," Hannibal said softly, taking the glass, filled more by Bedelia's standard than his own though in this moment he was thankful for her tendency to overpour, by the stem and bringing it to his nose to sniff. He did not have much of a desire to appreciate the aroma, it was more of a muscular response really.

Did it have to be Frederick Chilton?, Hannibal thought bitterly. Of all of the options, did it have to be the man that was nothing but a poor imitation of Hannibal himself? Was Will forming a romantic relationship with the far inferior doctor just to spite Hannibal?

Hannibal felt like he had been standing, waiting for a train to arrive. Then he turned around and was hit by a car.

Admittedly it was not his best metaphor, but the man was rattled. Will continued to surprise, although this one was thoroughly unwanted.

Hannibal knew, logically, that he had no reason to be angry. He had left Will behind with nothing, no daughter, no friends, a missing gallon of blood. Will clearly had not been interested in a life with Hannibal over a life with the very man behind bars. The younger man had no obligation to Hannibal, much less to the sanctity of a relationship that didn't exist. After all, wasn't Hannibal doing much of the same with his previous psychiatrist? Who was the doctor to say that Chilton was taking what wasn't in any way, shape, or form, Hannibal's?

Logically, Hannibal knew all of this. However, that did not stop him from taking a very long sip of wine in an attempt to numb the fury simmering inside his chest. The movement only succeeded in making Hannibal irritated at the realization he did not have as much control over his emotions in this predicament as he would like to believe, if they were influencing his actions in such a way. Even a long sip of wine was out of sorts for the man.

The things Will Graham did to him.

Hannibal wouldn't even allow himself to dwell on the man or what his actions meant for them. He feared he would only become more askew if the doctor came to terms with what this unwelcome revelation truly meant.

Bedelia drank from her own glass, placing a hand on Hannibal's shoulder again. Her fingers made soft rubbing motions against the black collar of his shirt, perhaps for a form of comfort. It did little to do so.

"Will you return to America?," she questioned, sounding thoroughly disinterested. Doctor Du Maurier always sounded that way, however. She was as good at hiding her emotions and maintaining a "person suit" as Hannibal was.

Hannibal did not turn to look at her, electing to stare into the fire with the next sip of wine. "Why would I do that?," he asked, quietly clearing his throat. "I have no desire to be apprehended."

"Do not play dumb with me, Hannibal," Bedelia admonished, releasing her grip on Hannibal's shoulder to sit in the chair across from her husband. Crossing her leg over the other and causing her deep green satin dress to shimmer in the shift within the loose skirt, she continued, "You miss him. Although it would appear he does not miss you."

Hannibal said nothing and refused to look at Bedelia as she drank more of her wine.

"Is he toying with you, Hannibal?," Bedelia coaxed, examining Hannibal's face as she drank in unison with him. The blond woman could hold her liquor better than anyone Hannibal knew aside from himself.

“It’s a possibility,” Hannibal admitted softly, leaning back in his chair, running his fingers over his face with a gentle sigh. “Although I had hoped he would have more respect for himself then to date someone of Frederick’s pedigree.” A vague note of acidity crept into his tone but he reeled it in quickly, pressing his lips together tightly.

“Will Graham strikes me as someone who will take what he can get in terms of romantic relationships,” Bedelia lamented lowly. She drained the last of her crimson drink and stood, moving past Hannibal and giving his shoulder another swift squeeze.

“Once that bottle is finished,” Hannibal said in a slightly raised tone so his voice would carry to where Bedelia was pouring more alcohol, still not moving his eyes from where they were fixated on the burning logs. “Feel free to open the nineteen ninety three Burgundy.” The doctor brought the glass to his lips, letting the red wine wash over his tongue and down his throat to try and soothe the burn of Bedelia’s words in his chest.

It hurt because he knew Bedelia was right. Hannibal was not an imbecile, he knew it was a likely prospect Will was attempting to take advantage of the killer’s feelings to lure him back to the states in a jealous rage. There was the likelihood Will truly found himself enamoured with Frederick, but Hannibal felt those chances were slim. Or at least, he hoped so. For the first time in quite a while, Hannibal felt the fog of doubt clouding his ability to see what was truly in front of him.

Whatever integrity Will had behind his intentions, they were effective. Hannibal had to resist the twitch in his fingertips to open his tablet and book tickets for the earliest flight to Wolf Trap.

He wasn’t willing to wrestle with what was keeping him from doing so. Not tonight.

Bedelia made an affirming humming sound and a ghost of a smile appeared on her face. “Finally. I was wondering how long it would take for you to break that out.”

Hannibal smiled with no real joy behind it. This was an unexpected wrench in his plans for him and Will. Will would not come for him. Now it became a matter of waiting. A predicament of who would cave first, and fall prey to the other's lure. Hannibal wasn’t sure

how this would pan out, and he despised the fact that he didn't know. Will Graham had, once again taken all control from Hannibal, and now it was up to Hannibal how they would proceed.

This was going to be more difficult than Hannibal had initially gleaned.

The man tilted his head back and depleted the remains of his chalice.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry the first two chapters are so short. I'll try to write longer ones from now on, I just wanted a bit of an introduction :))

Willing Accomplices

Chapter Summary

Will starts to build his lure

The Freds fight over money

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the large separation between chapters. I can't promise it won't happen again. I also apologize for the shortness

Will had started crafting the new lure after Chilton had visited him in the hospital a second time to inform the injured man of Bedelia Du Maurier's disappearance.

Hannibal Lecter had not been seen by anyone since Will was forced to watch him cut the throat of Abigail Hobbs in front of him. The man had vanished covered in the blood of what was supposed to be his family, taking their daughter with him into the darkness.

Even Zeller could have put together that both doctors leaving town at the same time was not a coincidence.

Will had not known the exact nature of Doctor Lecter and Bedelia's relationship, but he came to the conclusion he had been replaced fairly quickly as Hannibal's partner.

The sting of rejection was infinitesimal compared to the emotional turmoil Will had gone through in Hannibal's kitchen, but it was still there. The idea that the killer could substitute him with someone instantaneously just like everyone Will knew had done when he was imprisoned was painful. It made him angry too. Whether at Hannibal or at himself, Will wasn't certain. A burn under his skin like an itch he couldn't soothe that only fed the desire to see Doctor Lecter again the longer he laid in the uncomfortable hospital bed, helpless.

Despite everything Hannibal had done to him, why did Will want to see him again so badly?

It didn't matter why Will felt the way he did. Only that he was going to find Hannibal even if it killed him.

Obviously it was a romantic connection between the psychiatrists, that was the only reason Bedelia would have possibly gone with him, was to be his wife. The outcome was the same whether the marriage was for an easy explanation as to why a man and woman would be living together or as a result of genuine amorous feelings from either party, it hardly made a difference.

Will did not care.

The man spent a lot of time in the hospital, healing from Hannibal's forgiveness. A lot of time for him to think. About who put him there. Where the other man was. How he was going to find Hannibal again. What Will would do when he did find him. When Will hunted him down.

Or, at least, he would have hunted him.

If Chilton hadn't told him about Bedelia Du Maurier skipping town and then immediately said "Are you jealous, Will Graham?"

The ache in Will's side was numb with the copious amount of drugs streaming through his veins. It was ironic in a way, the man made an effort to avoid medication most of his life and here he was, morphine constantly circulating through his body for the week he'd been stuck in this awful hospital.

God he hated this building. The blinding white lights and blank walls were suffocating. Constant streams of people asking him how he was feeling and touching him, even if it was just to change his bandages or examine his wound, made his skin crawl and Will found himself fighting the urge to seize at the contact more than once, not just from pain. He

couldn't help it, any touch that made him vulnerable when Will had been gutted and laid bare at Hannibal's feet made him feel neurotic.

More than that, it made Will feel vile.

Chilton trying to convince Will to join his revenge plan was almost enough to have the man rip his IV out and take the chances of infection to tend his gash himself. This new invasive question from the doctor was no less revulsion inducing.

He didn't make eye contact with Chilton, electing to stare at the ceiling and count the plastic diamond within the pattern of the light instead. "It seems you've misinterpreted my relationship with Doctor Lecter, Frederick," Will said slowly, eyes darting to the medicine bag and pointedly not looking at the smug look upon the psychiatrist's face. You would think with a man whose face was half replacement synthetics would not be able to leer with such self satisfaction, and yet Frederick Chilton continued to with no apparent issues. "When fishing, the lure does not fall for the predator." He allowed his eyes to dart over to the psychiatrist's face to gauge the man close to his bed.

Chilton lifted his brow in a motion that was so clearly a poor imitation of Hannibal's elegant browarch raise. The urge to scoff was very strong but Will was good at masking emotions and physical tics, he'd been doing it for years as a result of his autism since the people around him, excluding Will's father, found it so unpleasant when he did otherwise, it was practically second nature to the man. Chilton was no new challenge, albeit an exceptionally irritating one.

"Really, Will," Chilton seemed to tut and Will wondered how he could possibly remain upright with how big of a head he had about himself. It would seem the only change prison, and by association, Hannibal, had made to Chilton was a newfound belief that he could survive anything. As if the man's ego really needed inflating. "Do not sell yourself so short. I would describe it more as," the man took a pause, walking to the side of Will's bed to look down at him and Will did not attempt to avert his gaze this time, more so out of spite than anything else, "two predators' mating dance gone wrong."

Will's brows lifted in skepticism, turning his eyes back towards the ceiling. "Will that be going in your book, Frederick?," he asked dryly. Will wondered how long this visit would last, and how far he could make it out before hospital security took him down.

Chilton merely shrugged indifferently, incessantly tapping the bottom of his cane on the linoleum floor. “I don’t think a romance would be very appealing to my readers,” the doctor mused. “I’m hardly inclined to share my own, much less that of a serial killer with no satisfying conclusion.”

Will’s heart clenched painfully, though he refused to show it on his face. He wasn’t angry with Hannibal for hurting him. He was devastated, yes, but it was all of his own making. Chilton was right, Hannibal may have closed the cover on this story, but Will wasn’t ready to put the book on the shelf to gather dust until it was nothing more than pages full of regret. Will was owed more than that.

He and Hannibal were owed more than that.

But Will’s mind snagged on Chilton’s words and he turned his head face the other man. “What did you say?,” he asked hoarsely.

Chilton tilted his head slightly in question. “I don’t want to share the romance of a serial killer?”

Will shook his head slightly, looking back at the ceiling. “No. Your own romance. You don’t share it.”

“Is this your way of asking me out, Will? Are you already looking for a rebound?”

Will’s mouth twitched and he resisted the urge to scowl. “That’s not what I meant,” he elaborated slowly. “I meant, your romantic life is unknown. Blank. It’s perfect for a rewrite.”

Will felt Chilton’s eyes studying him with newfound interest.

“What wheels are turning in your head, Will?,” Chilton questioned in a quiet tone similar to what he used when Will was under his exclusive psychiatric care.

Will’s gaze shifted back to Chilton, a small conspiratorial smile on his lips. “How would you like a sequel to your book, Doctor Chilton?”

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Freddie Lounds looked at Will like he was crazy.

Will was used to that look by this point.

“I know I’m not FBI,” she said, looking between Will and Chilton carefully. “But this is quite possibly one of the worst plans any agent has ever come up with.”

Will didn’t bother to mask the heavy sarcasm in his tone. “I don’t think I’m employed with the FBI anymore, so it shouldn’t be an issue.”

Chilton smirked at Freddie, hands clasped around the head of his cane. “Miss Lounds, you and I both know the competence of the FBI,” he paused, looking for the words, “leaves something to be desired.” He glanced at Will. “No offense, Will.”

Will didn’t bother responding, instead examining his fingernails.

Chilton continued without waiting for a confirmation from Freddie. “There’s nothing illegal about this,” he said smoothly. “People lie all the time. It’s hardly a crime to fabricate a relationship.”

“I’m not worried about the law, Doctor,” Freddie pointed out, though Will saw the way her fingers twitched, as if she was already typing on her beloved keyboard. “I’m worried about what Hannibal Lecter might do to me to find out more.”

“Don’t flatter yourself so much, Freddie,” Will said coldly, eyes fixated on the rims of his glasses still. He was glad to have them returned to him after the hospital. Forced eye contact with doctors and nurses had been one of the most unsavory parts of his recovery. “He has no interest in hurting his most vital source of information.” This time he did lift his gaze up, staring beyond Freddie’s shoulder. “As long as you remain useful, providing intel, you’ll remain alive.”

The heavy silence that often followed when Will said something others deemed unsavory, hung in the air for a few moments.

Chilton took it upon himself to awkwardly break it. “Will’s right. You’re in no danger.” He leaned forward, speaking one story exploiter to another. “And what a thrilling story it would make, wouldn’t it?”

Freddie seemed to mull it over, but Will knew he had her, hook, line and sinker.

“What’s in it for me?,” she asked, briskly. The question wasn’t aimed at Will, Chilton was the only one who was equally invested in the prospects of yet another tale surrounding the Chesapeake Ripper.

“A collaboration. Co-writer of my new book.” Chilton was less than thrilled at sharing, but Will insisted their plan had no chance without Freddie’s platform, the only one Hannibal seemed to pay genuine mind to. “You can publish your own version on your website too.”

“Royalties?”

“Seventy-thirty.”

Freddie laughed loudly, shaking her head. “I wasn’t born yesterday, Doctor. Fifty-fifty.”

Chilton scowled sourly. “You’re getting electronic and paper publications. You don’t need fifty percent.”

“There’s no such thing as a best seller website,” Freddie countered.

Two of the most stubborn, money and publicity hungry people Will knew. Suddenly he was mildly interested in where this was going.

“The age of the internet is upon us,” Chilton challenged. “You could end up making more than I will.”

Freddie looked smug, smirking at her adversary. “We won’t know for sure, now will we? Unless you’d like to take your chances with the newspapers? Or perhaps starting your own website, as all reputable doctors do, I’m sure.”

Will had no amount of fondness for either of the two, but he could admit to a twinge of satisfaction at seeing Chilton taken down a peg or two.

Chilton’s expression soured, but sat back in defeat. “Sixty-forty,” he sighed. “But my name is first on the cover.”

Freddie beamed with her victory, straightening her posture. “Will my picture be on the inside or on the back?”

“Both of us. On the back.”

“Separate author’s notes?”

“Yes. Mine will be first because of my title.”

“Naturally. But all of our interviews have to be together. Unless I say otherwise. To show collaboration of course.”

Chilton’s brow twitched and Will was immensely amused by the man’s struggle.

“Of course,” Chilton repeated bitterly.

Will let himself smile slightly at the aftermath of the doctor’s surrender. He hardly had to wait a second before Freddie was reaching for her camera.

“Excellent,” she said brightly, looking up at Will and Chilton after pressing a couple of buttons. “Cuddle up close, you two. We don’t want the good doctor to catch on too fast.”

Will’s humor faded but he had no intention of backing down now. Sliding closer to Chilton, he set a hand on the doctor’s shoulder without asking and looked to Freddie.

Once the bait was cast, all Will had to do was wait. The man might cast a second time, but Will wouldn’t relent. He had no intention of chasing after Hannibal anymore. He was a fisher, not a hunter.

With a snap of Freddie’s camera lens, the lure’s first feather was tied.

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